

Madagascar

Ridgwell

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BY PALANQUIN AND CANOE.

A record of four months' Journeying among the Sihanaka and Tsimihety Tribes,

We started the journey anticipating a busy time, and a journey of interest and we got both. We were to tour a province where both the people and their province would be quite new to us. We who were dwellers in the highlands of Imerina were to dwell for awhile in the plains, we were to leave a compact district where a dozen villages could be seen at once from any eminence to journey long days by palanquin over dreary wastes to villages scattered and hidden. The first day we did by train, leaving the Capital while the stars were still shining and arriving well after dark at a primitive little terminus with its one-line track and its little swinging oil lamp that seemed to make the darkness more dark. Arriving at our destination the train came to a stand and we alighted to be surrounded immediately by a crowd of black heads; these apparitions were to be our hearers for the first week. Soon we were left alone and the little station was shut up for the night and we retired to rest in a carriage of the train that had brought us, for the village consisted of a score or so of roughly put-up rush houses; and none were to let.

Friday 7 a.m. We were swinging along the road in our palanquins at a good even pace, the men, all sorts and sizes, are in excellent spirits and keep up a ceaseless chatter which every now and again explodes into a roar of laughter; they are veritable children and the least funny thing tickles them hugely. Their garb is of all colours and shapes; one sports a pair of trousers and a bare back, while the other has a coat once the pride of an administrateur, and bare legs; their hats are even a greater joke, for the most part of native straw, but occasionally some battered specimen that has done full service on the Parisian boulevards now ends its days up a woolly head. They are mostly lithe and muscular and keep up a good four mile an hour pace, at times breaking into a trot then pulling up sharp nearly jerking us out of our seats. The sun is well up and hot as we reach our first stopping place, a typical Sihanaka village and especially interesting to us as the first we have seen. The zozoro huts, cleverly made of the tall papyrus rushes which abound everywhere in the marshes, are built in line with every front door facing the west, that the setting sun may look in before it dies. They look so clean and orderly and artistic. Children are playing in the sunshine and the women with dark brown faces and elaborately plaited hair stop their matmaking or other occupations to stare at the European and his wife, but more especially the latter, for a white woman is the rarest of sights in these parts. We make our way through the village to the doctor's house; he is the son of an honoured Christian worker in Imerina who was partly educated in Europe, and is doing very valuable mission work; we know the father and so are cordially received by the son and liberally entertained. By this time the heat is scorching outside, so we rest and chat awhile before resuming our march. This village boasts a growing church and although far beyond the bounds of Imerina, comes within the far-flung line of Mr. Gale's wide-stretching district. From here commences the district of the Isam-Enim-Boland. That night finds us several miles further north. Saturday morning. Four hours brings us to the capital of the Sihanaka province; it is the seat of the Administration and a growing place. A great number of Hova have migrated here.

But the great interest of the place for us lies not in the present, but in the past, for the ground is sacred to the memory of the martyrs of the great persecution of 1837, brought here in chains, chained by the neck hands and feet in heavy irons that chafed their way to bone, forced to march here from Tananarive - a journey of several weeks - that they might be exhibited in the

market place as a warning to all who were drawn to the worship of Jesus Christ; but also that they might die of malaria in this fever stricken district. The plan worked only too well for few survived to tell the tale. The town too is sacred to the memory of the noble service of two devoted L.M.S. missionaries - Rev. J & Mrs. Pearse. Their untiring and earnest self-giving remains a fragrant memory among the older inhabitants, and their works to follow them. Near the spot where the martyrs sat daily in their chains stands to-day a fine large church seating not less than 500 people, and filled every Sunday. Here the church folk received us with the utmost cordiality and most generously supplied all our needs.

Sunday morning. It is a great inspiration to preach to this crowded church and a great privilege to bring greetings from the L.M.S. Imerina committed to one of its former children. The mention of the names of Pearse, Stribling, Mackay, Loxall, and others brightens the faces of the older worshippers and stirs grateful memories. The pastor, a man of deep earnestness and zeal, welcomes us warmly and renews the appeal to the L.M.S. to take up again the work laid down.

Sunday afternoon. We are away to the south to visit a purely Sihanaka village. The Church, a large roughly constructed building is full, the worshippers mostly squatting on mats. Our welcome is very generous and real. We feel peculiarly stirred in facing a purely Sihanaka congregation. Happily they all know the Hova dialect, and so can understand what we say to them. We reach Ambatondrazaka just before sunset.

Monday morning. Sunrise sees us on the road to a distant church we are asked to visit. Returning we have an opportunity of seeing the town. We are shown the church and school Mr. Pearse built and the house in which he lived, but alas these places have all passed out of Mission hands. The church was sold by auction by the French Government soon after the Rising for 40 dollars, and although the buyer has been offered 1000 dollars he refuses to seel it, and so it has become a warehouse. The school that once bore the name of L.M.S. has now become the "Ecole Officielle". The house where for 6 years Mr & Mrs Pearse lived and laboured is the official residence of the local administrateur who has little or no sympathy with missionary propaganda. "Inchabod" seems the appropriate word to write over it all, but the God who dwells not in temple made with hands still abides in the midst, and His Church is going forward.

Wednesday. We have travelled for two days through a succession of their villages, none of them very large but mostly very picturesque with banana groves and tall graceful growing sugarcanes, and the pungent odour of drying tobacco leaves. And now the sun is on the wane, and we are not a little tired as we approach the town of Imerimandroso - a city set on a hill - overlooking the calm wide stretching lake of Alaotra, bordered north and west by high ranges of hills. It is a beautiful view. As we turn a bend in the road we come in sight of a crowd of men, women and children. We arrive to find the church has turned out to greet us. Ramarakoto the pastor of 14 years standing heads the company as they come forward to welcome us. We are quite embarrassed by their numbers and cordiality, what a lot of handshaking! We leave our bearers to bring the palanquins while we finish the journey through the town on foot with an escort that grows bigger and bigger as we go. Soon we arrive at the house at which we are to stay for a month. The position gives a magnificent view of the lake and the range on range of hills beyond looking due west. The house stands in a wide ground and is large for a native house consisting of 4 small rooms. The lower have tiled floors and whitewashed walls. Alas! the winds blow keen for it is the beginning of winter, and there is no glass in any of the windows, but this is a trifle and can be remedied with sheets of tough paper.

Thursday. Our cases of books and belongings have arrived and so the day is spent in unpacking and arranging. Friday and Saturday afford opportunities of visiting. The town is of considerable size but consists mostly of Hova from Imerina. The Sihanaka have scattered to the smaller villages around the lake.

From our veranda we can see the church and large wellbuilt not inartistic burnt-brick building. Its pastor, a Hova, who nevertheless by his long residence here might almost be claimed a native - is a fine type of Christian and a splendid witness to the solid work done here by Dr. Mackay and Mr. Stribling over 25 years ago. Beyond the church stands the pathetic remains of what was Dr. Mackay's house and hospital and near to it the home of Miss Foxhall, now just a piled-up heap of rubbish. We visited the spot, clambered over the broken bricks, but little remains distinguishable. The sight almost moves one to tears to think of what might have been.

Sunday. We make our way through the ordered streets and are greeted on every hand by spotlessly dressed worshippers on their way to church. They are for the most part very simply dressed in white and donning the ubiquitous lamba (a large sheet worn gracefully over the shoulders). We arrive at the church to find it crowded. The sight is both picturesque and inspiring. There are signs both inside and out of repairs and innovations going forward, and we are told that only three years ago the church was entirely burnt out. We esteem it a privilege to bring the message from the Imerina churches and especially from the L.M.S. to these "colonials". Surely it is an evidence of the good work done in Imerina that here 250 kilom from the capital is a flourishing church entirely independent giving splendid help to near weak churches, and receiving no supervision or European oversight. Only one thing mars the picture, and it is that only a handful of Bihanaka are to be found in the Church. Those that are members are very real and sincere Christians.

Imerimandroso, Friday, June 28.

We have been here a month and have carried through our programme of classes for preachers and although the numbers have been less than we hoped the interest shown has been very encouraging. We have spent each week end in visits to near churches holding services, giving lantern exhibitions and meeting with the leaders. The sewing classes and Womens' meetings here have been exceedingly successful and greatly appreciated judging by the expressions of thanks. The childrens' services have been an inspiration one would have been sorry to miss. The Government's refusal to allow us to visit and hold services in the near villages is a real disappointment, but we had visited three villages before the refusal arrived, and so have seen something of the village life here. I am convinced that with the evangelistic liberties of England the country would be speedily evangelized if not Christianized and the work would prove to be the finest stimulant to Christian activity our churches and evangelists could have. It would undoubtedly revivify the church and charge it with spiritual fervour but alas this is not England! I must record my visit to Manakasina. I was told that some of the people there were anxious to have a church so I appointed a time and went over to the village some 4 miles away. As soon as I arrived about 20 people gathered in a hut, and contrary to the law I held a ~~short~~ service. One hymnbook was produced but none had Bibles. We discussed ways and means and I was delighted to find that although they had no church since the rising 23 years ago they had recently told a Catholic priest who urged them to sign a petition for a Catholic church, that they were Protestant! We arranged satisfactorily for the application to the Government and are now only awaiting the reply. Many asked to buy Bibles but I was only able to spare them two, for owing to the war the supply from England was short. There is a great deal of ignorance and superstition around us everywhere here, "Fady" days are a great feature in the life of the people when all work is taboo, everyday is "fady" to some in some villages.

Saturday - June 29. Our work here at Imerimandroso is practically done and we leave this morning for a 10 days tour in the scattered district of Morarano, west of the lake. Luggage all packed and the carriers and bearers having arrived, we make our way down to the shore of the lake where two large dugouts are in readiness to take us over the lake. We are a caravan of 14, 16 with ourselves. There is not much room to spare in these long dugouts! They are about 24 feet long but not more than about

2 ft. wide, quite unprovided with seats, so that one has to perch on the baggage. The day is perfect, there is just a gentle ripple on the water, our canoes are crowded for several others have joined us. Storks fly screeching overhead, and wild ducks in large flocks take fright as we disturb their haunts and fly up protesting, a shot at random could bring 5 or 6 down quite easily. A pretty little white bird very similar to a sea-gull skims the water and every now and then darts down and catches its prey. Fish are fairly plentiful judging from the catch we see in the fishermen's boats we pass; they fish entirely by line except for the eels which they spear very cleverly. As we pass near to one boat, a short slim canoe with only room for one person, we shout to know if he has any eels for sale and are there and then generously given the only two he has; we find later that he is a church member at the place to which we are bound.

Midday. We have been 3½ hours in crossing and have got cramped knees, and pins and needles, glad to get out for a stretch. But our destination is still some 8 miles further on, so after a meal of rice and fowl we get into our palanquins and start forward. Leaving the village we pass, tall forked posts stuck in the ground in the front of tombs, and on these are impaled large tin boxes while by the side there are broken chairs or umbrellas or other similar personal belongings. This is the custom of the Sihanaka to place in these tin boxes the possessions of the deceased and to place them on the tomb for the spirits' use. Our attention is arrested by the next tomb near by; on the top of the tomb which is a large one and built of hewn stone, is erected a life-sized effigy of a man clothed in a long loose white shirt and wearing a hat and sun spectacles. We make enquiries and find that this too is a custom peculiar to the Sihanaka. But this one has a special interest for us when we learn the story. It is the effigy of the late pastor of our church at this village, he only of all his relations was protestant, the rest were catholic. Early this year he was taken seriously ill and got rapidly worse; his relations gathered and urged him to be baptized a catholic before he died, but he steadfastly refused; he grew weaker and they urged again, and when he was too weak to speak he waived them off, but as life ebbed out and he lost consciousness they brought a priest, a European, and baptized him. The body was then denied to our Church, people who wanted to pay their last respects by burial - a most important thing to the Malagasy. No! said the relatives, he died a Catholic! Feeling is naturally very bitter towards the catholics in that village, and no wonder, but we advised the church to suffer in silence and show a Christian spirit - protests avail nothing. Unfortunately this is not by any means an isolated instance of Roman Catholic propaganda here in the Island.

After two hours we arrive just before sun-down at the village where we are to spend the week-end. There is nothing outstanding to note except, perhaps, that there is an unusual swarm of mosquitoes for winter time. Across the valley stands the house of an Australian cattle dealer, a fine upstanding specimen of a man, and away on the plains below are herds of his oxen, he had probably about 2,000 head. We have a strenuous week-end and get in 3 meetings and a lantern show on the Sunday; on Monday morning by 7 a.m. we are on the road again, and by mid-day have entered into the province of another evangelist whose 5 Churches we have come to visit. The first we reach by midday to find the church-building not yet finished; our people are worshipping as yet in the house of one of its members, so in the afternoon we take Harold Copping's "Hope of the World" and attract a housefull almost beyond bearing for the air is stifling hot and we are crowded into a corner of a dirty low-roofed room. The people by the door strain to see the picture, and all eyes are at attention. We tell them something of each of the nations represented, and then lead on their interest to their spiritual condition, then we speak of Christ's coming, how He came to save all peoples, white and black, yellow and brown, how He draws all within His embrace; then we urge all our listeners to find in Him their home. Before we leave next morning they urge us to give another picture talk, so we crowd it in before we trek. Three others of this Evangelist's churches are old causes, two

at least were in existence when Dr. Mullens came out to Madagascar as a deputation from the Home Board in 1874. We visit them all in turn holding at least two meetings in each besides conferences with the leaders and the selling of literature. The other remaining Church is a new congregation and they have been and still are worshipping in a long rush hut, the building of a brick church however is going well ahead - but hereby hangs a tale. The evangelist tells us the story. The people got permission to build a church and they put up this "zozoro" one - a similar building to their houses only bigger - and here they worshipped for some little time. But a few of the more zealous spirits - Hova lately come from Imerina - urged that they should build a brick building. Church meetings were held and they decided to go ahead. They were to meet each Thursday and make the bricks. Thursday came and only 4 put in an appearance; for several weeks following no more came so a meeting was called and protest made. Well! said the delinquents "let's pay for them to be made", but this suggestion was overruled, and the meeting ended in all pledging to start the following Thursday and work in earnest; but Thursday came, and only a handful appeared. Things were reaching a crisis! On Sunday another church meeting was called and then the reason came out. They were not lazy but frightened to work. "We have never built a brick building, and we fear that if we disturb the soil and make bricks and build a brick church we shall incense the spirits of our ancestors and of the four corners of the earth. If you will agree to our sacrificing an ox to "Zanahary" (God) and our ancestors then we will make the bricks". But, replied the minority we cannot agree to that for this is to be a Christian church and how can we found it by heathen rites"? "We need not let the evangelist know, insisting the majority, "we can tell the government officials that we are killing an ox for the rice workers". But the others were obdurate so that the majority went off one day soon to the forest, and there in the quiet unknown to their companions slew an ox and offered its blood as a ransom to the gods, and now the building is almost ready for worship. These old heathen rites are rooted deep down, very deep and the fear of spirits is no light thing. May the knowledge of Him who said "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free", snap the bonds and loose the fetters of these enthralling superstitions!

Saturday - July 13th. It is a fortnight later, and we have been back to Imerimandroso for just 3 days while we unpacked and repacked for a week's tour in the north of the province where there are 6 churches. It is getting dark and we are still on the road and have been on the road since 7 a.m. We were up at 5.30 a.m. and should have reached our destination

long ere this, but our bearers failed to turn up to time. The days journey has led through a lonely mountainous track, hills rising in tiers barren and bleak, with here and there a wooded valley to break the monotony. The wind all day has been very keen. We have seen only 2 tiny villages all the day, and only 2 carriers have passed us on the road. Midday found us at a little hamlet of a dozen huts. It was 4 p.m. and no sign of the bearer with our food. We scanned the horizon in vain for a sight of him. Happily we were able to buy a little boiled rice and a few eggs - very dry and insipid for we had no salt. We were at a loss for implements to eat it with until we discovered we had an empty cough lozenge box which broken in two served us as spoons. But how we longed for something to drink an hour later. We have arrived in the large growing town of Andilmena but they have given us up so our arrival causes no little stir. Lights are brought and we are conducted to our lodging, a good-sized room in a well-built brick house, and hasty preparations are made to get us a meal. It is 10.30 p.m. before we get in.

Sunday morning. The next morning finds us in a fine large newly built brick church quite as big as some of our "mother"

churches in the capital - which by the way is 4 days journey to the south from here. The church is full, but again it is a Hova congregation. We are graciously introduced by the pastor who is an old pupil of Dr. Mackay. He is not Hova but belongs to the Tanosimboahangy tribe which peoples this province. We preach morning and afternoon - there are no evening services in Madagascar - and find the people splendid listeners. The following morning the church is crowded again for the "Isan-Efa-Boland" or 4 monthly meeting of the 6 churches, and we are commissioned by the missionary society in the capital to introduce the new evangelist just arrived. Then follows an appropriate address on "How to reach the unevangelized tribes", and we are happy to have a share in the discussion for one of the chief reasons for coming is to spur the churches on to attempt more for the people of the other tribes, the real indigenes of the province as a whole are still absolutely untouched by the gospel, as if no Christian Church existed in the Island. The typical Hova when he goes abroad seeks a Church or craves permission to build one. There he worships and is satisfied. He knows practically nothing of evangelization. The fact that all open-air work is forbidden by the Government cuts the nerve of much active evangelization.

Tuesday morning. No bearers have arrived, and we hear that 500 men have been taken from this district alone for 30 days pressed service on the new railroad which is being laid right up to the Lake. We fill up the days in meetings and visiting, and it is Thursday morning before we get away on a visit to the smaller outlying places. After about 2 hours travelling west we reach Bemaitso and here we are greatly cheered to find a vigorous young church with a most enthusiastic pastor, and both pastor and people are of the tribe that inhabit this province - Tanosimboahangy. There are a handful of Hova here however, and one old woman with a pair of pince-nez fastened to her ears with pieces of wire tells us that she has been here for many years and intends to die here - she is one of the leaders of the Church. "My friends" she says, "when they are ill are always writing urging me to return, they say they want me to come and nurse them, but I reply in Christ's words 'Let the dead bury their dead', I am doing Christ's work here and cannot come". There is a good deal of excitement in the village at our visit. The meetings are very enthusiastic. The worshippers have put up a very creditable brick building, and are very proud of it. Many of the people are fearfully degraded. The children follow us everywhere but alas! when we speak to them they cannot understand, no, nor we them, the dialect is different here and the children do not yet know the Hova.

Tuesday morning, July 23rd. Andilamena. It is four days since we left Bemaitso and we have been to two other churches since then, we are now waiting for bearers to take us north. A strong appeal has been sent to our L.M.S. Committee in the capital for a deputation to be sent to visit them, and we are asked to go if we can. We learn it is 5 days hard travelling north of here, and there are only 4 churches in this far district in the country of another tribe, the Tsimihety. After much and long consideration we agree to go, and now all our baggage is packed and we only await them. The weather is not propitious for the wind is high and very keen, and the rain comes in gusts. We should have been away by 6 a.m. we leave instead at 10.50. After ~~xxxxxxx~~ 2 hours we stop at a little straggling village for midday meal. It is still raining and some of our baggage is wet

through already. Fortunately there is a church here, and we are generously entertained and speeded on our way with many kindly expressions. Our journey lies over some rugged hills and through patches of pretty forest, but the violent wind and rain compel us to sit tight and to hold our umbrellas firmly down on our heads so that we see little of the view. 5.p.m. and we stop for the night. Everything is dripping with rain, and we too. The men and the baggage are soaked. The chief of the village has given us a hut, and we commence to unpack and fix up our beds for the night. We need some exercise for we are chilled through. The house is of the usual papyrus rush kind, just a big hut 8 ft by 10 ft. In the right hand corner is the fireplace which consists of 3 large stones on which is set the cooking pot. As there is no chimney the smoke has to find its way out through the thatch in the roof, consequently all about the fireplace and in the near vicinity hang long cobwebs of soot. At the other corner is a bedstead which consists of 4 branches of trees stuck upright in the ground, with cross branches fixed on top on which is a papyrus rush mattress. A few baskets hang from the roof, a tub for keeping honey stands in the corner; a few rush mats on the earth floor and the house and its furniture is accounted for. This is a typical house for many miles round. We wait as usual at least 2 hours before our cook brings in a bowl of rice and some stewed fowl, and then before turning in we have a short service in the house of a Hova we have discovered in the village is a member of the church we passed midday. 8. a.m. next morning sees us on the road again; the day is dull and there is rain in the wind. It is about 15 kilom. to the next village of Andranambo and we do the journey in 2 hours. As we enter the village we see by the commotion that something is going on. As we pass through to the Travellers' Rest house (the Government's Gite d'Etape) we see there in the centre of the village a fierce looking individual with no clothing on save a loin cloth, squatting on a large mat, with a huge knife in his hand. He is cutting up a freshly killed ox, while all the mongrels of the village prowl around catching stray bits and licking up the blood. It all looks a very gory spectacle. Arriving at the rest house we are followed by two men who come to present us with large joints of the meat. We thank them very cordially, and enquire of our men as to what is going on, and are told it is a "Tsikafara" which is the paying of a vow. We go back up through the village to present our compliments and thanks to the master of the ceremonies, and there running to and fro is his winsome little son of some six or seven summers with dark chocolate coloured skin and glittering black eyes, with a slip of calico fastened round his waist, carrying what remains over of the slaughtered sacrifice to his hut. The little child has been seriously ill, and the father thinking the gods and the spirits of his ancestors were angry, vowed to sacrifice an ox if the child's life would be spared. Happily the father did not consider that enough but sent a messenger away over the mountains to the government doctor for advice and medicine, and slowly the pain-racked form of the little child got rest and the burning fever subsided and the victory was won; the child recovered, the gods were appeased, so the vow was kept and all in the village who brought small gifts of money received in return gifts of meat. Certain portions were put aside for the spirits and the blessings of the ancestors, of the Creator, and of the four corners of the earth were invoked. The tail which is part of the offering was stuck up on a pole in the village near to the house of the ceremony. We yearned to tell them something of the great Lover of little children, and so we followed the child home and did our utmost to tell them something of Christ, but it was all so new, they had never even heard the Name. We had little time to spare for as soon as our midday meal was cooked we were to push on so as to reach our destination before nightfall, but we felt constrained to do something to shed a little light in this dark spot, so we gathered the villagers into a hut, promising to shew them some pictures. The little rush hut was soon crowded to suffocation, the

doorway thronged with a crowd of eager black forms of men, women, and children with such a motley show of garments and elaborate hair dressing, with beads, earrings and other ornaments. We showed them pictures of some of the scenes in the life of Christ, and tried to enthuse them with the wonder of the coming of a Saviour, Son of God, but alas! it was a bitter disappointment to see the puzzled looks on their faces. We were speaking in the Hova dialect they could not understand for they were of the Betsimisaraka tribe. We felt dreadfully chagrined. They tried to show us their gratitude and give us their thanks but our hearts were heavy at our failure, we could only pray that God Who reads that greater language of men's hearts would give light to that dark village. After a hurried meal that was by this time waiting for us we were on the road again. The night saw us encamped in a tiny village of a dozen huts situated right on the edge of the forest. The scene will long live in our memories. We had had our evening meal of rice and fowl and had rigged up our camp beds for the night. It was very cold, the wind whistling through the broad leaf-walled hut, and chilling us through. We prepared to turn in when the low thud of a tom-tom caught our ears and the first shrill notes of a flute came floating in on the wind; there was to be music. We decide to see what is going on, so we slip out of our hut which is at the far end of the village and stroll along to where the dark forms, quite indistinguishable, are grouped in the centre of the village round the players. The moon, to-night at full, rides high in the sky while big black clouds sail rapidly by, every now and then passing over its face. The players, some standing, some squatting, are in the dark shade of the huts while the black forms of some of the listeners are silhouetted against the black mass of forestry. It is a weird sight and the mournful tones of the flutes added to the rattle and thud of tom-toms makes the atmosphere feel almost uncanny. We are right in the heart of a forest miles and miles from any European and amongst a wild-looking people. But we know the Malagasy too well to fear them. The music is strange but exceedingly good and despite the cold we stand and listen until the last notes rescho and die away into the great dark silence of the forest. We thank the players warmly and turn in. Next day we hear that the music was in our honour and we are glad that we turned out to listen.

Friday evening 8 p.m. We are dead tired, for we were up by 5.30 a.m. and have been travelling hard since 7.30 a.m. with only a short break for a meal at noon. After two days' journeying through beautiful forest scenery we immersed this afternoon into a long deep valley flanked on either side by steep rocky mountains whose peaks were lost to view in the clouds and mists that played about their tops. The rugged magnificence of these heights and the lonely awesomeness of that valley are indelible memories. A deep silence brooded over the scene that was almost uncanny. No sight of hamlets or any living creature, only nature stern and wild. The light was waning as we emerged from the forest we had traversed and in which we had lived for the two days, and the darkening shadows added to the scene. Both we and our bearers were hoping soon to reach our destination for that night, but to our dismay we found we were still some 4 hours south of it. The travelling had been very hard, for the ceaseless rain in the forest had made the roads a quagmire and the steep declivities slippery beyond words. One after another of our bearers would measure his length in the mud and we should all but be following in his train. The forest scenery had been extremely lovely especially in the valleys. Flocks of small paraquets and other strange birds would every now and then start up with a cry and cross our path and be lost again in the trees. Magnificent palms and trees bordered our road on either side in the deeper valleys, and everywhere was rich tropical vegetation. At mid-day every day we camped in some clearing where a handful or roughly built huts of split interlaced bamboos with thatched roofs of pandanus had been built up on props off the ground. Night time would find us at some other little forest village surrounded on all sides by

giant trees, bamboos, and almost impenetrable vegetation. Perhaps there would be a few score of very degraded natives who eke out a livelihood by collecting honey and wax in the forest. These were of the Etsimisarakaka tribe, so unfortunately we could not converse with them beyond a few words of enquiry and thanks. Nothing is done to bring the light of the knowledge of Jesus Christ to these forest dwellers. We had passed the last church on Tuesday midday and we did not reach the next until late Friday evening although we had travelled hard each morning and afternoon. It ought perhaps be said that throughout the whole of this wide province the country is rocky and mountainous and very sparsely populated indeed, practically only on the main routes to the north. We had reached Marotandrano soon after 8. p.m. on the Friday night, and had had to rouse up the Governor of the village to get the use of the government rest house. We paid our men and they soon disappeared into the darkness for the night. It was 10.30 p.m. before we got a meal, and then were too tired to eat much so we turned into bed for a few hours before starting on our last day's journey to Mandritsara. The rest house consisted of one large lofty room with tiled floor and whitewashed walls, and entirely bare but it was very welcome nevertheless. Saturday morning we were leaving at 7 a.m. when we noticed just outside the village tall forked posts on which were impaled tin trunks containing the worldly possessions of those who had been buried in the tombs underneath. From near by came the sound of low chanting, and we could see the white figures of a procession from the tombs further off, and learnt that they were "turning the bodies" in a tomb. The custom is a very common one all over the island, although much less in evidence in Imerina than formerly. The bodies of the dead at burial are swathed in "lamba-mena", a red native-made silk cloth, often very beautifully woven and ornamented with beads. They cost anything from 3 to 50 dollars each, and as many as 20-30 are used for the burial of a rich native, but as a rule 2 or 3 suffice. After a time when the body has decomposed and the covering been eaten away the relatives open the tomb at stated periods, collect the bones and wrap them in new "lamba". In olden days more than now it was a time for feasting, rum drinking and dancing; heathen orgies and hideous debauchery were freely indulged in.

We had travelled into the province of the Tsimihety tribe, an almost totally unevangelized section of the Sakalava peoples who inhabit the country west and north-west of the island. The Sakalava were the only people the Hova failed to subdue in the early days of Radama the King of the Hovas, in the early part of the 19th century. Physically they are very superior to the tribes of the central provinces, and were in those days much fiercer and more warlike. They lived by raiding and carrying off both cattle & people, and often devastating villages. Since the occupation of the island by the French however, the depredations of these wild people have been stopped, but there is still a good deal of cattle stealing carried on in a surreptitious way giving the authorities a great amount of difficulty. The whole province lies in a very hot zone, many thousands of feet lower than that of the central provinces in the highlands of Imerina. We were glad it was winter time, for even then the heat was overpowering in the midday. Just outside of the village we pass a grove of rofia palms and some Travellers' trees; the first we have seen; they make the country look unmistakably tropical. Our objective for midday is the little village of Beakarangy, some 20 kilometres or more south of Mandritsara. The country we pass through is pretty and undulating with high mountains stretching far to the South. There are practically no villages as far as one can see, only hills and valleys and clumps of trees or rofia groves dotted about, rivers are small and few. By 11 o'clock we reach Beakarangy - a small village of perhaps 20 houses all told. We are welcomed cordially for the people here are almost entirely Hova who have come north, some only recently, and we find they are attached already to our church at Mandritsara, though that is nearly 5 hours journey further north. By 1.30. we are

"on route" again. Climbing the hill to the north of the village we get a magnificent view; down far below runs a long wide valley of mango groves, a dark olive green; beyond hills rising up and up, tier on tier, and in the distance stands the capital of the province, Mandritsara, our destination. Soon after 5 p.m. we have reached the banks of the river that flows past the town, and are met by the evangelist and pastor together with a great crowd of church members who escort us through the squalid town - it is a slum in a paradise - although the people are by no means destitute, but being Hova, have built mud-brick houses after their custom and allowed them to get into disrepair. At last through many winding ways we are brought to a dilapidated looking house with a small tiled room downstairs, and two attics above. The walls have been whitewashed, but that was a long while ago. We are given chairs in one corner of the downstairs room and soon the room is crammed and the doorway filled too with curious natives who want to see what we are like. After a minute or two the evangelist voices the welcome of the church and all sing a hymn of welcome and the pastor offers prayer. They are truly delighted to see us for it is very many years they say since a missionary paid them a visit. It is now growing dusk and our bearers are waiting to be paid off, so our visitors one by one file out and we are for a season left alone. The journey and the heat had proved too much for my wife who had by this time developed the early stages of an attack of malarial fever. It was hardly an ideal spot in which to be ill for the two attics above were small and low roofed, and close almost to suffocation, and as soon as the dusk set in mosquitoes and large black cockroaches made their appearance. Next day being Sunday we had little opportunity of seeing the town and its surroundings, but had a full day at the church. The big building capable of holding 600 or 700 people was practically full both morning and afternoon. There were all the outward signs of a very live church. The present church which dates from after the French occupation, has, under the supervision of a native evangelist, steadily progressed, and now boasts a membership of about 150, and a weekly congregation of several hundreds, also a large Sunday school and Christian Endeavour Society. But with the exception of about a score of the Tsimihety tribe, the worshippers are entirely Hova who have migrated here from the south for purposes of trade. Strange to say, however, that the pastor and his mother, who is one of the mainstays as well as being the founder of the church, are both Tsimihety. Ramatoa Ranona is a remarkable personality; recently she had to travel to the capital for medical advice and was treated by our mission doctor, Dr. Moss. The church took the opportunity of sending her to our L.M.S. committee to plead that a missionary be sent to the Tsimihety tribe, and in their letter they said "she is worth two or three men to us". Her moving appeal - herself a Tsimihety - stirred the hearts of everyone who heard her, and that was how we came to be asked to extend our journey north and to pay a visit to Mandritsara to encourage the churches in this province and to spy out the land. Ramatoa had returned to Mandritsara by the time we reached there and from her own lips we heard her story, and the story of the beginnings of the church there. She had been brought up in gross heathenism following all the practices and rites of her tribe, and trusting implicitly in the diviner, when one day she had a vision and in her dream saw a big black book suspended in the sky, and certain letters the meaning of which she could not tell being unable to read. She was greatly troubled by her dream and went off at once to the diviner for its interpretation, and was ordered to make certain useless sacrifices to avert foreboding evil. Then a strange thing happened: Being a woman of some wealth she bought a little slave girl for 70 dollars (\$14) who had been brought up from Betsileo - a province far to the south of the island. One day as the child was cooking the mid-day meal her mistress saw her take something surreptitiously from the folds of her dress and pore over it. She asked the child what it was and was told it was a book - a Bible. On examining the book the woman saw that it was like the thing she had seen in her dream and on opening it saw letters like to those she saw written in the sky. "Can you read this?" she asked the child; "Yes" she had been taught in the mission school far, far away in Vatsileo, where too she had been given the book. It was agreed that she should teach her

mistress to read. The book became spelling and reading book, but something infinitely more, for in it she read of God as Father, and of the coming of a Saviour, until little by little the old heathen customs, fears, and beliefs dropped away and the light flooded her soul, and she sought for peace and found it. The sequel to this story remains to be told. It was in 1895 that the French landed an army on the West coast and marched on the Capital which soon capitulated. There was a church at Mandritsara in those days but the year following the French occupation came the rebellion that swept away so many churches and amongst them Mandritsara. Practically all the Hova adherents fled for fear of their lives, but this woman stayed, and when the new French Administrateur was appointed to quell the rising and administer the province this woman boldly went to him to crave permission to start the church again. Her friends tried hard to dissuade her, but God's call was too insistent. She got permission and started services and from that day to this the church had gone steadily forward so that now there is a vigorous cause at Mandritsara, and 3 smaller daughter churches in the district, and applications have recently been made for 3 more. The great sorrow of Ramatoa's life is that so few of her tribe, the Tsimihety, have as yet been won for Christ; there are only a mere handful in all the district, the people are so firmly rooted in heathenism. They regard Christianity as the religion of the Hova, and the memory of old feuds prejudice their minds against anything Hova. Rum drinking is a fearful menace and is rapidly decimating the population and ruining the physique of the natives; we were told that 4 or 5 deaths occur at every fete. If only a missionary could settle amongst them there is little doubt that great numbers could be won over to Christianity. The churches besought us to return and take up our abode there, or send some one else, but we were forced to tell them that at present, at least, nothing could be done, for the missionaries were all too few for the work in hand.

Our stay in this district lasted for 10 days in which time we visited all the 4 churches holding a series of meetings in each. The lantern proved a great attraction; pictures of any kind always ensure an attentive audience. With both large scripture pictures and the magic lantern we were able to attract numbers of natives who had never previously entered a church or heard a word of the Gospel. About a mile to the South of Mandritsara is a small village almost entirely composed of old African slaves and their families. Their black skins and woolly hair mark them out at once as being different from the Malagasy whose features are finer and whose skin is lighter. The old people were brought over from Africa by Arabs when they were quite youths, but they still remember a good deal of their life, and amongst themselves speak their mother tongue. I was one day speaking of God's protecting care of His people and to enforce the lesson I showed them a large coloured picture of Daniel in the lions' den. A lion is an unheard of thing in Madagascar but they recognised it at once and next day three of them came over to Mandritsara to buy a picture of a lion - fortunately I had some small replicas of the one I had shown them and they were delighted.

Tuesday mid-day Aug. 6th. We are at Amboabo, having arrived here yesterday morning, since when we have held 3 services and had a conference with the church members, and sold a number of books. Our tour in this district is at an end, we leave to-day for the South, returning by a different route from the one we have come in order to visit some Sihanaka churches we missed previously. We have had a busy but a happy ten days. Whenever we have not been holding meetings we have been selling literature, discussing church affairs and visiting. The people everywhere have been exceedingly generous, gifts of all kinds, including over £13 in money to pay part cost of our travelling expenses. We leave amid expressions of overwhelming thanks and sincere sorrow at our parting so soon, and our own hearts are at one with theirs.

Tuesday evening 5. p.m. We left Amboabo in the intense heat of the midday and travelled along the stifling valley through rofia and mango groves, exceedingly lovely, but overpoweringly hot. After a while we climbed the high peaks to the South where we got magnificent panoramic views. On the way we occasionally passed large upright stones with pieces of calico tied round them. If a native dreams of his dead relatives he immediately resorts to the

diviner for an interpretation of his dream, and is usually told that the spirit of the dead one dreamed of is cold and is asking for clothing, and so a piece of cloth must be tied on the stone erected to the memory of the deceased. Offerings of tobacco and food are often placed on or near the stone which is venerated as holy, and resorted to on all sorts of occasions.

We have crossed many hills and valleys and are now in sight of the village where we are to spend the night. It is an absolutely heathen place where no evangelist or missionary ever comes. We can see a procession in the distance and hear the sound of drums and fife. Is it a funeral or a wedding? The strains swell louder and louder as we approached and the procession wends its way down the hillside. The whole village has turned out. Judge our surprise when we discovered that it is all in our honour. We are escorted up into the village which is most picturesquely situated on a hill top surrounded on all sides by higher ones. The tri-colour floats in the breeze over the Best House, and chairs are placed outside for us in full view of the players. These are elaborately dressed in costume, and behind are the women singers. The music is very weird with very little tune in it, and so utterly different from anything English. There appear to be no words, but just low chanting that rises at times in rapid crescendo to a shout and then dies down again. The dancing is not very animated, but an easy graceful swaying motion from the hips accompanied by a graceful swinging of the arms. After nearly two hours we were forced to retire to unpack and fit up our beds and get a meal, but although the players went off to the other end of the village they kept the music up until well after midnight, until we were compelled to ask them to stop so that we might get some sleep, otherwise they might have gone on all night. But next morning they were there again and played us out of the village and across the stream where they waved us goodbyes. We longed intensely as we looked into their bright eager faces to gather them together and tell them something of the joy of the knowledge of Jesus Christ, but the law forbade and the dialect made it impossible. We found three Hova who had recently come to trade here, and we urged them to do whatever they could. Unfortunately they cannot start a church unless they can persuade 7 others to make an application, there must be no less than 10 signatures on the demand. And so the days went on full of new sights and experiences. The roads were exceedingly difficult at times being nothing more than a cattle track and led over high mountains, and down into deep valleys, across many a river infested by crocodiles in summertime, but now never more than a few feet deep. The country, bare and mountainous, is very sparsely populated indeed, we would travel all day and not see any more than a single village where we broke our fast at noon, likely as not we should not meet a single soul. So the days wore on until Wednesday and Thursday and Friday were passed and Saturday late afternoon brought us to our destination for that week-end, Miarinarivo. The days of that week had not been wasted, for in two or three of the villages we had passed we had found some odd one or even two of the natives who had learnt to read, in some he proved to be the native official, and so we had opportunities of a talk on religion and had in each case left a New Testament, and a hymnbook or other suitable literature. I shall never forget one village where we stayed for a noon-day meal. While the meal was cooking we entered into the house of the chief of the village, and found three or four men sitting idly within. After the usual preliminaries of conversation we found we could make ourselves reasonable understood, and so we launched into deeper things. The men were interested and came nearer, and as we talked of the life beyond and the nature of God, and then on to the coming of the Son of God their eyes lit up with a new light, and they plied question after question; it was "mahagaga" (wonderful) they said, and all so new. Happily one of their number could read so we marked a Testament and gave him together with other books, on condition he gathered the people of the village into his house at least on Sundays and read to

them the Word. The remembrance of that little hut talk will always remain an inspiration. Little remains to be recorded of our journey. That Saturday evening found us back in the Antsihanaka district and in a village (Miarinarive) where there is a vigorous church and a splendid pastor doing fine service for the Kingdom of God. We had travelled every day since mid-day on Tuesday and had passed through a number of villages, but none where there was a church. In this large tract of country there is neither church, nor evangelist, nor Christian worker of any kind; none to dispel the darkness of heathenism, and the gross superstition. None to speak of the loving heart of a Father or of His Saviour Son. There were days when we travelled for hours on end in silence "losing and seeing the horizon among the ceaseless waves of the earth", for the country was mountainous and barren, and devoid of the sight of a single hamlet, or the face of a single soul. Madagascar is an immense island some 30 times the size of England & Wales, but the whole of its population will only half fill the London area. Outside the Central provinces the people are very scattered. We spent the week-end at Miarinarive and were most hospitably treated. We were able to hold three successful services, and have some useful talks with the pastor and people before we left to trek South on the Monday morning. We reached Andilamena by moonlight on Wednesday night, at a few minutes to 11 p.m. having gone out of our way on the evening of that day to give a lantern show at a Tanosy village. Thursday saw us on our way further South for Amboavory - a little lakeside village on the N.W. of the Alaotra - a village noted for the making of exceedingly fine plaited mats in most intricate patterns. On Friday morning we met the church here and had a service before crossing the lake for Imerimandroso which we reached 16 days after leaving Mandritsara. But our stay here only lasted long enough for us to re-visit some of the near churches and pack up for our return journey. A week later we said "Good-bye" most regretfully to our newly made friends here, especially to the pastor and his wife; the regrets at parting were mutual and very real, these especially had proved warm friends and their kindness to us was so very generous. The remainder of our journey lay over the ground by which we had come, and gave us the opportunity of visiting churches in some of the villages which we had only passed through in coming. Unfortunately a dose of fever interfered somewhat with our programme, and prevented our visiting two of the most out-of-the-way churches we had wanted very much to see and encourage. Tuesday, Sept 3, was the day of our last meeting and departure for home. It was the 4 monthly meeting (Isan-Efa-Bolona) of the churches in the Ambatondrazaka district and was held in a little village among the hills some three miles to the East of the town. The little rush church was crowded to suffocation, and a temporary annexe no less full - between 300 and 400 people had gathered. There was a splendid alert, enthusiastic spirit all throughout the meeting, led by the young pastor of the Ambatondrazaka church. It was an inspiration, and we felt it an honour to bring greetings from the Imerina churches, and especially from the L.M.S. mission that had done so much for this district more than a generation ago. We tried to lay the burden of evangelising the Sihanaka people on their hearts and urged them with all our power to attempt more for the Kingdom of God. The meeting lasted for several hours, and afterwards a great feast of rice and meat was provided for that big congregation, the church had killed a bullock for the occasion. Two days later we steamed into the Terminus at Tananarive, at 3 p.m. and it seemed we had come to another land, for on every hand were signs of European life and modern innovations. The beautiful station is quite worthy of any city in England; big electric lights (arc lamps) illumine the booking hall and platforms and also the approach, while outside in the town the main thoroughfares are equally well lit up. The fine Government offices and large stores remind one of life in a European city. It was all so different from the quiet village life we had left behind 'far from the madding crowd' where time has brought no changes nor left its finger marks of the civilization; the life there to-day is what it has been for generations. The people live as their forebears did, and see no reason on earth for a

change; where life is elemental, and primitive, and where consciousness seems to slumber.

Looking back over the journey we have been privileged to take in the interests of the Kingdom of God we desire to thank Him very deeply for the joy of service, and for His unfailing grace. We pray from the depths of our hearts that He will pour out the riches of His grace on these churches and people, and that the light of His truth may be shed abroad in the provinces in which we have been so privileged to journey, that the dwellers there may know the truth - the Truth that makes men free.

(Sgd.) Harold A. Ridgwell.

Ambohidratrimo.

Dec: 1918.